

Option!
Juvenile Alcohol Diversion Program
Vital Statistics Sheet

Time Frame: September 19, 1994 - May 5, 1995
Number of Citations Handled - 256 issued to 233 individuals

Option Enrollment 108 (41 currently enrolled, 11 enrolled in next session)

Enrolled and Completed Option 67 (62 successfully completed, 5 unsuccessfully completed)

Number of Offenses (233 individuals total)
20 individuals with multiple offenses
3 individuals with three offenses

Recidivism rates through May 5, 1995,

4.8% recidivism for successful completers of the Option Program (of the 62 successful completers, 3 have had multiple offenses)

9.9% recidivism rate for those juveniles who did not enroll in the Option Program (of the 171 who did not enroll, 17 have had multiple offenses)

Time Frame: September 19, 1994 - November 2, 1995
Number of Citations Handled - 444 issued to 385 individuals

Option Enrollment 151 (12 currently enrolled)

Enrolled and Completed Option 139 (130 successfully completed, 9 unsuccessfully completed)

Number of Offenses (385 individuals total)
47 individuals with multiple offenses
11 individuals with three offenses
1 individual with four offenses

Number of Offenses for Successful Completers of Option
8 individuals have had multiple offenses
3 individuals have had three offenses

Number of Offenses for Individuals Who Did Not Enroll in Option
39 individuals have had multiple offenses
8 individuals have had three offenses
1 individual has had four offenses

Recidivism rates through November 2, 1995

6.2% recidivism for successful completers of the Option Program (of the 130 successful completers, 8 have had multiple offenses)

17.3% recidivism for individuals who did not enroll in the Option Program (of the 225 who did not enroll, 39 have had multiple offenses)

*9 individuals who received citations either lived in a different county, moved away, or entered in-patient treatment for alcohol dependency.

If one looks around the world today, one might get the notion that there are many punitive attitudes and laws that are directed toward juveniles. The average American citizen most likely gets bombarded with countless bits of information pertaining to the increase in juvenile crime and the loss of respect for authority among juveniles. Enter into this dark and dismal scenario a hopeful and positive idea entitled the Option Diversion Program. This is a class for juveniles who have received an underage drinking citation for either consuming or just possessing an alcoholic substance in Winnebago County in the state of Wisconsin. This approach utilizes the "Talking With Your Kids About Alcohol in a Diversion Program" curriculum. The curriculum has its roots in the Prevention Research Institute of Kentucky and the minds of Ray Daugherty and Terry O'Bryan. The Winnebago County Department of Community Programs, under the auspices of the Prevention end of the department and the Prevention Services Coordinator Dan Hinton, has been using the Option idea since September 1994 with juveniles who have been cited in Winnebago County for underage drinking.

Option is offered collaboratively by the Department of Community Programs, the police departments, the sheriff's department, the school systems, and the court system of Winnebago County. One complete Option class, which is taught at either the county courthouse or a local police department, lasts for six weeks and meets one night a week for two hours. If a juvenile receives an underage drinking citation in Winnebago County, they have two options: their first choice is that they can pay their fine, go to court, have their license suspended, probably have their insurance go up, and have the citation on their permanent record, whereas their second choice is that they can enroll in the Option class. Only individuals being cited for the first time can enroll. If the individual successfully completes the class, then paying the fifty dollar enrollment fee is their only consequence. No suspension of their license. No hike in

their insurance. No citation listed on their permanent record. Parents, law enforcement officials, and school personnel are notified of all successful completions.

Between the time frame of September 19th, 1994 through November 2nd, 1995, 385 juveniles received citations for underage drinking in Winnebago County. Of those 385 individuals, 139 enrolled in the Option class and 130 successfully completed it. A third of the individuals who received underage drinking citations during that time frame, therefore, did not tie up the court system and learned a tremendous amount about alcoholism and drug abuse. The expectation before the program began was that the recidivism rates for both successful completers of Option and people who did not enroll would increase at varying rates. The recidivism rate for successful completers was expected to increase at a slower rate than the recidivism rate for people who did not enroll. The gap between these two rates was expected to keep growing.

An analysis of the program has shown that, up to this point, these expectations have come true. From September 19th, 1994 through May 5th, 1995, the recidivism rate for successful completers of Option was 4.8%, while the recidivism rate for those who did not enroll was 9.9%. From September 19th, 1994 through November 2nd, 1995, the recidivism rate for successful completers had only jumped to 6.2%, while the recidivism rate for those who did not enroll had jumped to 17.3%. The Option program has been very successful and effective so far, not only on a practical and fiscal level, but also on a humanitarian level in terms of trying to stop problems with alcohol before they begin.

By Brian Fuchs, student intern from the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh social work department with the Winnebago County Department of Community Programs